

Mr. Speaker, I voted against the 'Freedom From Religious Persecution Act' because of conversations I had with religious leaders from around the world who convinced me this approach would not stop religious persecution, but could actually backfire.

During a meeting with a variety of Christian religious leaders organized by the National Council of Churches, I had the opportunity to visit with a number of bishops and ministers from Indonesian, Pakistan, the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. They were unanimous in their fear that the United States had very little cause to force countries to be more tolerant with different religious faiths. They were unanimous in their fear that this bill could be perceived interference by the United States and could actually make things worse for the members of their faith.

Since I've arrived in Congress I have been working to understand the role the United States plays as the remaining superpower, militarily and economically, and I would hope morally. I have met with religious and business and political leaders both overseas and here in the United States including Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner from Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) and known dissidents in Thailand. I am convinced we do have a constructive role to play regarding religious persecution, but this legislation does not meet that goal.